Statement by Michael O'Dell, Harbour Square Cooperative resident owner, in support of the matter of Case Number 02-38, PUD Application for the Waterfront project (formerly Waterside Mall) in Southwest DC, before the Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia, March 31, 2003 (continued from February 13, 2003)

Good evening Madam Chair and members of the Commission. My name is Michael O'Dell and I live at Harbour Square, a 447 unit cooperative one block south of the Waterfront project. I strongly support the proposed Waterfront project especially the reopening of 4th Street, SW between M and Eye Streets, SW. I support this action for two reasons: First, it can improve safety and access and second, urban planners have long recognized that many of the vehicular streets that were converted to pedestrian walkways 30 years ago have failed and have created other problems.

First, reopening 4th Street will improve safety and access. The fire and police units that serve our community are located on the north side of the Southeast-Southwest Expressway. Because of the Expressway, 7th Street SW is the only unimpeded street for 9 blocks between South Capitol Street and the L'Enfant Plaza Promenade connecting residential Southwest with the area north of the Expressway. The only other street that connects the Monumental Mall to residential Southwest is 4th Street, SW, however, the existing Waterside Mall cuts it off between M and Eye Streets, SW. The reopening of 4th Street, SW will not only improve access for our residents, but it will greatly improve our safety by improving access for our police, fire and medical emergency personnel, especially for those of us who live south of the proposed project. In this time of heightened security, reopening 4th Street, SW will also aid our residents south of the project in the event of an emergency evacuation.

In addition, because many of our neighborhood streets are not through streets and dead-end in traffic circles, the reopening of 4th Street would also help in relieving the pressure placed on our neighborhood when traffic backs up during evening rush hours because of accidents on the 14th or South Capitol Street Bridges.

Second, many streets converted to pedestrian walkways have failed and have created other problems. I was raised in the mid-Hudson Valley near Poughkeepsie, New York when in the 1960s, it was designated a "Model City" as part of a new federal urban renewal program. It experienced much of the same redevelopment that Southwest did including the closing of several blocks of its downtown to create a pedestrian mall. Within a few short years, the area declined and all major and many "Mom and Pop" stores on the pedestrian mall closed. The street became crime-ridden and home to vagrants and people felt unsafe. Recently, the city reopened the street to vehicular traffic and the street has come back to life and the downtown economy is rebounding.

Similar to Poughkeepsie, Waterside Mall has slowly, but consistently declined over the years—even with the presence of thousands of EPA employees and support of neighborhood residents. The Mall once had movie theaters, fine restaurants, a gourmet foods store, and an upscale meat market. Reopening 4th Street, along with the other proposed changes, could be a part of an economic engine that could provide our community with an opportunity to establish a vibrant cityscape and an economically viable neighborhood center.

More recently, the District has also demonstrated that reconverting pedestrian walkways back to vehicular traffic leads to immediate neighborhood benefits when it reopened F Street adjacent to the Portrait Gallery and G Street next to the Martin Luther King Library. These street reope[illegible]

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vehicular traffic movement and made pedestrian traffic safer in addition to eliminating what had become havens for drug use, vagrants, and crime. I know this to be true because I worked in the area for 21 years.

I strongly urge the approval of the Waterfront project as it is planned and the reopening of 4th Street, SW. It is a matter of both safety and economic improvement. Thank you for allowing me this time.